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ECUMENICITY: The Calling and Problem of the Church

By JOHN H. KROMMINGA*

I. Scripture and Creeds

IN AUGUST of next year the broadest ecumenical assembly of Protestant churches in the world will meet within easy reach of most of our churches, in Evanston, Illinois. Judging by past performances, we will probably hold aloof from this meeting as a denomination. We will most likely not even send observers. Very few of our ministers will visit the assembly, even to satisfy their curiosity. Is this right?

The liberal and Barthian churches of the world do not claim that they have the full answer to the ecumenical calling of the church, but they are groping for it. The Fundamentalist churches, while outwardly more confident, are actually groping also. If we are not groping and probing for the answer to this calling it must be either because we are confident that we already have that right answer, or because we do not hear the call.

I am convinced that the first of those alternatives is not fully correct; and that there is enough of the second in us to constitute a sin to be repented of. If we have the right answer, we all ought to know what that answer is, and make use of it. If we are not ready to do so, we ought to hear the ecumenical call more clearly than we have.

My purpose, therefore, in this series of three articles, is to promote a frank

and self-critical discussion of our reaction to the ecumenical call and problem. My purpose in these articles is not to walk a tightrope so cleverly that nobody can criticize anything that is said. Rather, it is to arouse such discussion as will lead to the right answer if we do not yet have it; and such as will tell us what is the next step to take if we have not already arrived.

Scriptural Utterances

THE critical urgency of the ecumenical problem arises out of the deplorable division of Christian churches in our modern times. Scripture obviously has nothing to say directly on the question of these specific denominations, since they did not exist in the

days in which the Bible was written. But if we consider what underlies the division of the Church into various denominations, and what moves men to seek their reunion or cooperation, Scripture begins to speak. It presents us with a tension between two ideals which touches on the very essence of the problem.

The classic Scriptural passage on unity is the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel. Here in his high-priestly prayer, Jesus pleads movingly and repeatedly for the unity of those whom the Father has given him. Just how important the unity of the Church is can be seen from the fact that Jesus twice (vv. 21 & 23) indicates that it is through this unity that the world will come to believe that Jesus has been sent

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forth of the Father. Unity therefore becomes part of the Church's witness to the world.

There are many other passages which support and elucidate this emphasis on unity. We can mention only a selected few. The requirement of brotherly love is too well-known in Scripture to require documentation. In Galatians 2:7-10 we find the Church facing the problem of unity, with the conclusion that it must and can exist among brethren who differ as to background and whose work carries them into different spheres. In Ephesians 4:11-16 we find the description of unity in the presence of diversified gifts. God builds up a holy catholic Church into the unity of the faith out of these diverse materials. In Luke 9:50 (he that is not against you is for you) and Acts 18:24-26 (Priscilla and Aquila instructing Apollos more accurately in the way of God) we find unity existing even in the presence of an imperfect appropriation of the full truth.

It would appear that there is no escaping the requirement of unity. But the other pole of the tension is equally strong. Scripture indicates in unequivocal terms that purity of doctrine is also to be maintained. How this bears on the modern ecumenical movement can be discerned even in John 17, which we have called the classic passage on unity. For here the doctrine that Christ existed before the world was, that he came forth from the Father, and that he returned to the Father, clearly underlies the plea for unity. And Christ's further prayer is, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth."

Other passages are even more explicit. Anyone who presents another gospel is to be considered anathema, Galatians 1:8, 9. This teaching is confirmed and supported in II John 9-11, where the doctrine of Christ is made the crucial point, and anyone who brings another doctrine is not to be received or given a greeting. For further emphasis on sound doctrine we may refer to I John 4:2, 9, 10; I Timothy 6:3; Timothy 1:13; 4:1 ff.; Titus 1:13, 14.

These citations are far from exhaustive. (For fuller treatment of this subject, cf. Acts of Synod, 1950, pp. 378-385.) But we trust that they are suffi-

cient to indicate that the genesis of the modern problem is to be found in Scripture itself. The Church is confronted with a tension which it has been unable to maintain. The pendulum of emphasis has swung from one side to the other. The perennial question concerns the attitude we shall take to these shifts of emphasis.

The Reformed Heritage

WHEN we turn to the Reformed creeds, it is not difficult to find utterances on the ecumenical question. To begin with the least relevant of the three, the Canons of Dort do not speak on the subject from the standpoint of principle. But if we grant the contention of the Belgic Confession that the pure preaching of the gospel is a mark of the true Church, it would certainly seem that the Canons have sufficiently demonstrated that a church which holds the Arminian position forfeits the claim to be a true Church. This general and applicatory testimony would seem to be the only bearing which the Canons have on the subject of ecumenicity.

The Heidelberg Catechism is more explicit, in Lord's Day XXI. The Church of Christ is described as covering the whole human race and the whole course of history; as gathered by the Word and Spirit of Christ; as preserved in the unity of the true faith; and as destined to eternal life. Further, the communion of the saints obligates every member to employ his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and salvation of other members.

It is particularly in the Belgic Confession, however, that we find a full and rewarding treatment of the subject. In Article XXVII the universal Church is professed. It is described as covering the whole range of history, even though at times it seems almost to drop out of sight. Further, it is found all over the world, yet it "is joined and united with heart and will by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit."

Article XXVIII goes on to speak of this Church as an assembly of those who are saved; and outside of it there is no salvation. No person ought to withdraw from it, but all should strive to join themselves to it. They should maintain the unity of the Church, bow

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their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and labor for mutual edification. In order to effectuate this, believers ought to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the Church and join themselves to this congregation, wherever God has established it.

Article XXIX is of crucial importance. Here the true Church is defined, in distinction, not from individual hypocrites, but from false churches. These are the marks by which it is known. "If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church."

True believers conform to this character, although infirmities remain in them against their will. The false Church ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Further, it perverts the sacraments and discipline.

Thus far the Belgic Confession. This is binding upon us. There is always the possibility, of course, of rewriting the Confession. But in this case, that possibility is properly remote. It would be hard indeed to find Scriptural

grounds to refute these statements. In the face of that difficulty, the arguments which might be raised carry little weight; viz. that these expressions betray an anti-Roman Catholic orientation and are not suited to our modern situation. We may well assume that these articles are here to stay.

It would seem to be clear, then, that in harmony with our creeds we cannot seek organic unity with any denomination which does not manifest the marks of the true Church as listed above. This does not necessarily mean that we may have no contact with them, or that we may not or should not seek the elimination of differences as a step preliminary to union. But the Confession holds that those denominations which do not manifest these marks are no true Church. Therefore we ought to be satisfied concerning these marks before we act as if any group were in fact a part of the true Church of Jesus Christ.

The Confession therefore leaves us with the very knotty problem of the application of these principles. How should we go about this? At this point, the Reformed tradition calls for patience, humility, and the judgment of charity. A haughty self-righteousness, issuing in a censorious attitude toward all others, is repudiated. This is implicit in the Confession, in the recognition that no denomination is absolutely perfect in respect to the marks of the Church.

Calvin makes this much more explicit in Book IV of the *Institutes*. The following quotations are just a small sample of his line of thought, and should prove very enlightening to us. Having spoken of the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, Calvin says, "Such a society should never be rejected as long as it continues in those things, although in other respects it may be chargeable with many faults. It is possible, moreover, that some fault may insinuate itself into the preaching of the doctrine, or the administration of the sacraments, which ought not to alienate us from its communion" (*Institutes*, IV, I, xii). And further: "But in bearing with imperfections of life, we ought to carry our indulgence a great deal further . . . For there have always been persons, who, from a false notion of perfect sanctity, as if they were already become disembodied spirits, despised the society of all men in whom they could discover any remains of human infirmity . . . But if our Lord declares, that the Church is to labour under this evil, and to be encumbered with a mixture of wicked men, even till the day of judgment, it is vain to seek for a Church free from every spot" (IV, I, xiii).

Calvin also has something to say about the spirit of those who promote separation, merely upon the grounds that all the members of a Church are not perfect. "Those, therefore, who are

most daring in promoting a separation from the Church, and act, as it were, as standard bearers in the revolt, have in general no other motive than to make an ostentatious display of their own superior excellence, and their contempt for all others" (IV, I, xvi).

* * *

IT IS a temptation to cite other statements at this point; but we must save them for possible later use. Beyond dispute, the matter of ecumenicity and interdenominational co-operation remains difficult, despite all that the Reformed creeds and traditions have to say about it. But it would seem that two facts stand out clearly at this juncture. The first is that there are certain marks of the true Church, and that we cannot deny them, ignore them, or compromise them without denying our Reformed position and the Word on which it is based. The second is that such things as separation for its own sake, human personalities, and differences of historic tradition are not to be exalted to the position of marks of the Church, and to be made the ground for perpetrating or perpetuating a separation in the Body of Christ.

With this orientation we shall discuss, in a second article, the historical process by which original unity has deteriorated into present disunity. A third article will consider various courses which suggest themselves to us for rectifying this situation.

The Covenant and Education

By N. H. BEVERSLUIS*

WITHOUT a doubt the concept Covenant is one of the organizing principles around which to launch a discussion on philosophy of education. Perhaps it is the central principle for Christian education. If this is so, we are indebted to the past for teaching it to us. As long as there have been Christian schools in the Reformed community, here and in the Netherlands, we have spoken of them as Covenantal schools.

A disturbing fact it is, then, that for

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many of us today, educators, parents, workers, the idea of Covenant has dulled, has remained in some part a verbalism as far as educational theory and practice go. We speak easily, in terms of it, of parental responsibility in education, of God's claim upon children, of their kingdom membership, of baptismal vows, of separation from the world. And it is right to do so. But when we try to define our education in terms of the Covenant, (educational ideals and objectives; the nature of the child; the content and disciplines of subject-matter; methodology; and so on) the situation is different. Then we do not speak as easily or with unanimity.

Far too carelessly we settle for one

of two alternatives: (1) to recite doctrinal shibboleths which, for all their accuracy, are either not fundamental or are not understood as being so; or (2) to use a new language of Christian education in common with non-Reformed Christian educators of our day. The first tends to self-deception and barrenness; the second, is incongruous. It is incongruous because among us, by all, the Covenant is said to be basic, whereas among non-Reformed evangelicals, however orthodox and zealous, Covenant theology, generally, is unknown or, worse, rejected.

What I would plead for in what follows here is that the Covenant idea become a livelier and more meaningful principle in our discussions. This

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would, on the one hand, bring to us the vigorous distinctiveness in education as now, in relation, say, to both Modernism and Arminianism, exists confessionally. It would also, more importantly, lead the way to a fuller life among us in matters educational.

I think I may omit direct discussion of such familiar distinctions as the basis of the Covenant, its parties, its Mediator, its sign, its promise, etc. These are common knowledge, and treatment of them is here not necessary. Meanwhile, all that is generally included in Covenant theology must of necessity inform and control what is said.

FIRST of all, then, something on the essence of the Covenant. When we use the word, what do we mean? I submit that first of all Covenant, in the biblical sense, means communion. Some prefer to say "fellowship." Covenant means, I think, this: a mutuality as between two parties, or better, two personalities, two moral beings. In Covenant as we conceive of it, the communion, the mutual giving of self, takes place between God and man. In the Scripture we read of it: "I will be a God to thee, and ye shall be my people." Although the initiative is wholly with God, and although God assigns the Covenant and its conditions unilaterally, it nevertheless means genuine communion between two moral natures, the divine uncreated and the human created. This the Reformed creeds express when they speak of "knowing God and enjoying Him."

To speak of communion thus, is at once to speak of its basis, of that which makes communion possible: the Image of God in man. It is this which constitutes man as man, as more than animal. It means that man is rational, and moral, and free, and immortal, and responsible. It means, even, that the creature, as created, possessed true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. It means that there was and is a reflection of God Himself in man. The Image of God in man makes communion possible, but also inevitable — from God's side by free intention, from man's side by increased destiny.

Now, Covenant as I am speaking of it here is broader than the Redemptive Covenant, or Covenant of Grace. It includes the whole of God's condescending intercourse with man. Covenant

began when God created man, with man's first contemplation of God's works, all about him and within him, by which he knew directly God's everlasting power and divinity. There ensued, inevitably, communion between the God who created and the man who, while a creature, was capable with God, so to speak, of stepping back from it all, to look out upon God's works.

Thus the pre-redemptive communion between God and man was a corollary of God's creation of man as a rational-moral being, after His own likeness. This creator-creature relationship, between two spiritual beings, broke into spontaneous communion between God and man. It was loving and condescending on God's part, religious on man's part. This was Covenant. Its essence was communion.

Next, I suggest that an immediate purpose of the Covenant, of this communion, was the perfecting of man. Now man in the state of rectitude was without flaw or defect. He was created perfect. Yet, Covenant communion between God and man, we know, was a relationship capable of enlargement, of growth. Thus we say that man, being able-not-to-sin, needed to become notable-to-sin. We may say that the state of rectitude, had the Covenant not been broken, would have become the "state of glory." It was in the nature of man, perfect as he was, to grow, to mature, to become "more perfect." For this reason the tree of life was planted there in the Garden, beckoning man to let it be for him a sacrament of life.

Now, this growth in perfection, I suggest, depended squarely upon Revelation. It was God's Self-Revelation which became the means of man's growth. Revelation came first of all in the works of God, works, as we have come to speak of them, in nature, in history, and in human personality. These revealed clearly God's everlasting power and divinity. Increasingly as the revealing God spoke to the creature in His total revelation, the creature's knowledge of God became fuller. This in turn enlarged his desire and capacity for knowledge. Knowing God better, he "enjoyed" Him more freely, worshipped Him more unselfishly.

This was man's growth, his perfecting. This was Covenant fulfilled. The God who created man for communion also endowed man with such capacity

and such revelation of Himself as to make communion both possible and certain. It is for this reason that the original Creation Covenant, if I may so call it, was pre-eminently suited to nurture the finest communion of all — namely, a dynamic, a growing, an enlarging communion between a God perfect in His attributes, and a creature perfectable in his attributes.

But then this perfecting, this advancing beyond original rectitude, involved the whole man, the whole Image of God. Think of it this way: Adam was to grow up as *Prophet, King and Priest* in true Knowledge, Righteousness, and Holiness. First of all, Covenant communion and its growth demanded of man answers to the questions: Who is God? What is man? What is the nature of the universe? Answers were given him in Creation-revelation, teaching true knowledge to man as prophet. But man was more than prophet. A second aspect in Adam of the Image of God we describe as "true righteousness." In the fellowship which the Covenant was to provide, this area, the area of moral choice, was to be pivotal. This phase of Covenant communion was intended, we may say, to establish man's perfection ethically; it aimed at moral establishment. God had revealed Himself in His works to man's knowing, thinking self. This general revelation was supplemented by what we call the Covenant of Works. It was a special revelation of God's will to the moral, volitional self of man. Contracting the law of God created within man, God communicated a direct moral law in specific terms. Prohibiting both neutrality and idolatry, it put sinless man to the test. Explicit obedience to an explicit command was now required if Covenant communion was to be enlarged, or even maintained. Eating of the forbidden tree or not eating became the issue. "If I am God as you can plainly know I am, and there is none else beside me," says the Lord, "then choose ye this day whom you will serve." Failure to do so would break and shatter all fellowship. Obedience, on the other hand, would not merely maintain a *status quo*, but would establish man in an unassailable rectitude. This in turn would have resulted in an unbreakable and perpetual communion, namely, "life."

A THIRD phase of man's perfection would then have been attained. Man would have been established in

the final potential of God's Image within him, namely, true holiness. A "habit of righteousness" would have been formed. The tree of life would henceforth have been his portion, both signalling and sealing man's union with God, in dedication and fellowship. This would have been man's heaven, his glorification, his life eternal. Nothing expresses so well the fulfilment of the Covenant as does the concept "life," or the breaking of the Covenant as the concept "death." The one means union, peace, rest, self-surrender, self-fulfilment; the other means the opposite. Life means dedication to God — true holiness; death means dedication to self, self-worship, but therefore also self-hatred, self-disintegration.

The aim of the Covenant, then, was to establish man as man. It was to nourish up within man the increased potentialities of God's Image in man, and to establish them beyond the possibility of defection. This would have been man's maturing, his perfection, his "glorification," his life with God. For it, God made provision in man's creation, in man's endowments, in His self-revelation to man, in His probationary command. That is to say, God provided for man's fulfilment as man in His Covenant with man. The manifest purpose of this Covenant was such communion with man as would guarantee to him life — abundant and unending.

This idea of the Covenant is not, of course, unrelated to that other idea we speak of as the end of education, namely, the glory of God. Certainly we know that the glory of God is the ultimate purpose for which Covenant communion was initiated by God. God created man for His own self, for His own glory. To this end He gave man His revelation and entered into Covenant with him. He endowed man with capacities for a growing communion and a developing humanity. The communion of life thus nurtured was such as would have assured the everlasting praise of God by the creature. God would have increasingly taken delight in the growing perfections of man, while man himself found his chief delight in praising his maker. Thus we may say that in proportion as man truly knew God — from His works and Word, and in proportion as man thereupon faithfully committed his life in obedience to that God, the communion between them would have become fuller, and out of this communion would

have come both humility and a profound sense of worship. And in the growing habit of worship, in man's exercise of holiness, God would have been truly glorified.

Such an idea of the Covenant is interdependent too with a further key-concept of our education, namely, that of the Kingdom. I should like us to think also of the Kingdom as a pre-redemptive Covenant reality. God created mankind a race, unlike, say, the angels, and to that end He created the family, husband and wife. It was, we may say, God's manifest intention to establish a community of image-bearers, of prophets, kings and priests; to establish a theocracy upon the earth, in which the Covenant would form mankind at once both horizontally in relation to mankind and vertically in relation to God.

This Kingdom, made up as it was of prophets, kings and priests, would have demanded and itself nurtured mutual instruction, mutual discipline, mutual appreciation among its members. That inter-communion among men would itself have advanced the perfections of those sharing in it. This would in turn have nurtured a fuller communion between mankind and the God of the Kingdom. That is to say, the Kingdom would have become another means in the Covenant for achieving the ends of the Covenant, namely, (1) the perfecting of man, (2) communion between God and man, (3) and above all the glory of God.

When, moreover, the Kingdom is regarded as a religio-moral commonwealth mandated under God to have dominion over the earth, to be both Lord and Steward of all of earth's goodness, it is clear that the Kingdom in its communal enterprise was itself clearly intended to be a memorial to this, that God's Covenantal purposes are best served when man, who has found himself in God, proceeds thereupon to lose himself for God — in endless service of Him in His Kingdom.

Consider now the effect of sin upon the original covenant. Briefly, sin broke, shattered the covenant. Man became an ally of God's enemy, the devil. At once man took to running, to hiding from God. He became a lost soul, a fugitive in the night. This had happened: the Covenant had been broken. Anything else one says — fall, total depravity, despair, death, fits under this: the covenant as described in the foregoing had been broken. Not

life was man's now but death; not communion but alienation; not friendship but enmity; not the Kingdom of God but the Kingdom of man, of Satan; not God's glory but the creature's. More than this, the way back was impassable. Not only impassable but unknown. A sword of fire became a fearful memorial to the fact that Paradise was lost.

This was man's fall, his tragedy. He fell out of Covenant with God. Had God at this point left him to himself, humanity would have turned in upon itself and died. Instead, something stupendous happened. God came looking for man. Just that first of all. Looking for man. This was grace, redemptive grace. A general restraining grace had preceded, but this, this looking for man, this speaking to him, this reaching for him — this was a rebirth of freedom, of hope, of life. For this was again the Covenant, the Covenant of Grace, new but yet the same. It was Covenant in its essence, whether now in Genesis 3, or Genesis 17, or Exodus 20, or John 3, or Romans 8, or Galatians 5, or Colossians 3. For here was again communion, life.

It is dramatized for us in the words: "I will put enmity." The Lord declares that He will break in pieces the friendship between man and the devil and put enmity in its place. Moreover, it is to be a warfare with victory assured: the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. In this mother promise we have the gospel. The chosen will be separated from the unchosen. A company of believers will exist apart from unregenerate mankind. A Theocratic Kingdom of truth and righteousness and holiness will challenge the kingdoms of this world, under the rule of Satan, for dominion of the world.

And much more. This, however, is clear: After the fall God reaches down in His sovereign grace to reclaim an alienated humanity. Not all men, but mankind as such is brought again into Covenant with the Almighty. This Covenant is the Covenant of Grace. Of it, to be brief, we may say this at least: while new and different, as Covenant it is a re-instatement of the old. To be sure, (1) true knowledge is now generated by a special redemptive revelation of word and act; (2) true righteousness is now wholly by grace and not by obedience; (3) true holiness is now conceived and born of the spirit, altogether supernaturally. But behind and over it all is this: that God reunites

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man to Himself in fellowship, in communion, in life. Paradise is restored.

IT follows then that in the economy of redemption we have not a new, unrelated, closed finale to human history and destiny. We find rather that it is a restorative, corrective, redemptive episode. This is not to diminish its grandeur, its uniqueness, its claims, its effects. It is rather only better to understand it, and especially better to understand the God of the Covenant, and the man of God whom the Covenant concerns.

If redemption means reinstatement, re-establishment of the Covenant, then points like the following need emphasis, particularly with a view to educational obligation and opportunity:

1. In redemption, in the Covenant of Grace, God's purpose for man and man's highest good still is communion with God.

2. His way into this communion now is first of all by restoration. That is, he must be regenerated, converted, justified; he must be brought back to the point at which the first man went astray.

3. But then he must in Christ "take up" where the first man failed; he must pursue a still fuller communion; he must grow; he must become perfect in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. That is, he must be sanctified and one day glorified. That is, he must be perfected.

4. Also the organic unity of mankind is still a fact, as is the growth of its members in mutual fellowship. Thus the family and the church, themselves manifestation of the Covenant, also become agents of the Covenant. And especially the Kingdom of God, though more dramatically now, remains the framework out of which the man of God lives and moves and has his being, in and under God.

5. So again, as man was created for the glory of God, he is re-created for God's sake. Not merely escape or restoration is the mood of redemption, but growth, perfection, for the glory of God, as before the fall.

6. Thus again, God's Revelation is still the means to Covenant communion. Indispensably special revelation is the means to restoration; indispensably, also, general revelation with its implicit moral challenge to knowledge and com-

mitment is a means to maturation. That is to say, man as Prophet must be restored and matured. He must again come to know God truly through the Bible and its climactic revelation in Christ Jesus, who is the truth, and whom to know is life eternal. But no less must he endlessly search out a fuller knowledge of God from His works in nature, in history and in the constitution of human personality. This involves, in general, the restoration and maturation of the Image of God with respect to true knowledge.

7. But this is also true with respect to true righteousness. First of all man must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But a corollary of this is man's exercise of his moral responsibility in freely choosing the good and the true in the totality of Christian life. (Thus, e.g., the covenant doctrine is wholly distorted when the covenant is made simply a haven, untroubled by the challenges and responsibilities of moral choice. When people, whether in the church or in the schools, claim only a status, and forget the responsibility which is essential to Covenant, when they forget that they must "choose this day whom they will serve," they define themselves out of the covenant). This is to say that the person robed in the righteousness of Christ will by that fact be restored to the point of freedom in Christ.

8. This will then itself establish him in true holiness. Reclaimed supernaturally by God from himself, the world and the devil, sealed with the blood of the Covenant, the man of God becomes a chosen and dedicated vessel. This means he becomes established in communion, in life, with the Covenant God. But again, only gradually, insofar as he truly knows God from His revelation, and learns daily in a hundred ways to commit his way to this revealed God. That is, true holiness is contingent upon knowing the true God, and the surrender of self to Him in free commitment. The freedom which is in Christ gives life, and to live in Christ is to be wholly dedicated in heart and mind and hand.

9. The dispensation of grace, then, has in it new and wonderful episodes, but they are most wonderful because they are never wholly new. The Covenant of Grace was new, but only as the old made new. The Image of God becomes a new creature, and yet it is the

old made over. God's special revelation is new but only in relation to and dependent upon the old.

I THINK it follows then that in order for regenerate mankind to attain progressively the true holiness, or communion of life, which the Covenant still intends for us and our children today, we shall in our education have to reckon diligently with all of general revelation, always under the light and discipline of special revelation, and underline for the child his duty to and capacity for the endless adventure of more knowledge of God and more willing commitment to Him. Learning increasingly to know God from His works in history, in nature and in human personality, and then becoming increasingly disciplined to choose for that God in every situation of thought and conduct — these are the Covenantal requirements upon all of us. They constitute the basic need of the personalities in our classrooms, as well as the sharpest answers to the question: what and to what end do we teach?

For this reason I plead on Covenantal grounds for education of the whole child, the child in process of both restoration and maturation, the child possessed of the Image of God. This means, as I see it, education in the traditional areas of liberal education: theology, the humanities, the sciences. Through them the child will come to know God, man, and the world about him. With these studies go the indispensable tools of learning: reading, writing, speaking, thinking. But none of this may be learned for the sake of just learning. All of it always is first of all chosen for learning because it is the stuff of a moral universe, because it provides opportunity endlessly for laying bare to the eye of faith the very mind and will and heart of God; also because it therefore provides opportunity endlessly for practice in uncoerced and intelligent commitment to the living God. This means growth in Covenant Communion. And this is the stuff of true education, such as, if we may put it so, Adam's children might have received, in the beginning, had man not been ensnared in a non-Covenantal, man-centered theory of education.

For only as the child of God comes dynamically to know God (and therefore also man and the world and himself) in His total revelation, and habi-

ually to commit himself in love to the God he has come to know, will he be getting the best of God-centered Covenantal education. For then education will be the perfecting of the Image of

God unto true dedication, true holiness. Then education will be disciplining the child as human, as religiously human. Then education will be the agency of true theocracy. And that means that

education will be fulfilling the purpose of God's Covenant with man: the perfection of the creature and the glory of the Creator, perpetuated in an everlasting communion of life between them.

Douwe Johannes Vander Werp

By JACOB G. VANDEN BOSCH

THE subject of this sketch was incidentally mentioned and his work partly indicated in the story of the life of the Reverend Leendert Rietdyk which appeared in last December's issue of the *Journal*. It might, therefore, seem superfluous to choose him as the subject of our present contribution, but his services to his denomination were so important that not to devote an entire sketch to him would seem ungrateful. Rev. Vander Werp did his work in this country between the years 1864 and 1876, years that may well be looked upon as the pioneer period of the Christian Reformed Church. What he did was characteristic of this era in two ways: he came from Holland and he trained men for the ministry by the method of apprenticeship, the only method feasible at the time.

This biographical sketch considers an important immigrant figure in what at the time was an immigrant church. Occasionally one meets with an individual who feels ashamed on learning that he is a member of such a church, and he begins to harbor the suggestion that it would be more honorable for one who calls himself an American to belong to one of the larger and older denominations. Such an one forgets that America is a transplanted civilization. Seemingly he does not know that most churches in America had their origins in Europe and were at one time composed entirely of immigrants or of immigrant stock. As such they brought with them both their characteristic tenets and their theory of church government. However this may be, the membership of all ecclesiastical groups in this land is composed of immigrants and descendants of immigrants. Hence it is comparatively of little importance to know how old or how large a denomination is, but it is of the utmost importance to know its attitude to orthodoxy; in other words, how closely it adheres to Biblical teaching.

DOUWE Johannes Vander Werp was born at Uithuizen, the province of Groningen, April 13, 1811. Up to his eighteenth year he was in training for the teaching profession, and for some years served as a teacher in an elementary school. But he did not remain a teacher very long, for the religious awakening of 1834, known in history as the Secession, so strongly appealed to him that he joined it, defended it, and became a proclaimer of the gospel of free and sovereign grace. For a while he labored at Dwingelo, but as early as the summer of 1835, a year after the Secession broke out, when he was twenty-five years old, he was called by the church of his birth place to be its exhorter. Here he preached six years. Because of the dearth of ordained ministers in the early days of the Secession, many exhorters were licensed to preach, a practice that gave rise to much controversy. Calvinists have always believed in an educated ministry.

Desiring to become an ordained minister of the Word, he left for the city of Groningen to sit at the feet of the Reverend Hendrik de Cock, father of the Secession, who by the churches of the province of Groningen had been authorized to prepare men for the ministry. This was in 1841. The following year, owing to the death of Rev. De Cock, Vander Werp continued his studies with the Reverend Tamme Foppens De Haan, designated by the provincial synods of Friesland and Groningen to carry forward the work of Rev. De Cock and appointed in 1854 a professor in the newly established theological school at Kampen. During this time Vander Werp also served the church at Leeuwarden, Friesland's capital, as exhorter. Having finished his theological studies in 1844, he was called by this church and ordained. It did not take the churches long to recognize his ability. Not only did he min-

ister to several important congregations, but he was also entrusted with responsible offices. He was chosen a delegate to almost every synod, serving at times as clerk, and much of the time he was curator of the Theological School at Kampen. Admittedly he was a man of influence in his group and highly respected. As collator of the important decisions of synods he continued to be of service to the churches long after his departure from Holland.

In 1864 he came to America, having accepted the call from the church at Graafschap, Michigan. This was only seven years after the birth of what is now the Christian Reformed Church, when the congregations as to number and size were small and their right to an independent denominational existence was repeatedly impugned, both here and in the fatherland. Besides, America was a young undeveloped country where the conditions of living were still primitive, especially among immigrants in new settlements. It must have taken conviction and courage for prominent divines in Holland to migrate to America and to join a small and seemingly insignificant ecclesiastical group. Yet several did just this, and Rev. Vander Werp was one of the first. Only the Reverend William H. Van Leeuwen preceded him by a year when he came to shepherd the church at Grand Rapids.

All this time a major problem was how to secure ministers for the constantly growing group of churches. This matter was first brought before classis in 1861 by the Reverend Koene Vanden Bosch of Noordoos and was discussed at later meetings of classis, so pressing it was, but no solution was found. All that classis dared to do was to ascertain whether there were young men aspiring to the ministry. There simply was no money to support anything like a theological school. Pioneers in a new settlement, as a rule, are not well-to-do. Besides, these were the days of

D. J. Vander Werp — Continued

the Civil War with its accompanying inflation and of the financial panic of 1873).

The only solution feasible under the circumstances was to request individual ministers to undertake the task of training men for the ministry. When in 1864 John Schepers of Vriesland came forward to present himself, he was referred to Rev. Van Leeuwen for preparation. Later Jacob Noordewier, who had migrated to America in the hope that the way might be opened to him to enter the ministry, was placed under the tutorial care of the Reverend Roelof Duiker, his pastor in the homeland, who had just then assumed the pastorate of the Grand Rapids church. But the general assembly decided to put an end to these scattered efforts and to concentrate the training of ministers in one man. In this way it was thought greater unity and efficiency would be achieved. The choice fell upon Rev. D. J. Vander Werp and proved to be a wise one, not only because he had the advantage of teacher training and teaching experience, but also because he himself had been taught by individual ministers, first by Rev. De Cock and later by Rev. De Haan, both university trained. He could at least try to teach his students as he had been taught. He could model his pedagogical efforts after theirs.

It cannot be denied that there are weaknesses inherent in the parsonage-school method of theological education. It has been said that a log with a brilliant teacher like Mark Hopkins on one end of it and a student with a good mind at the other constitutes a good college or university. This may be true, but a narrow curriculum cannot satisfy a real student, cannot give him the breadth and the intensity that a sound education for the ministry demands. Rev. Peter Marshall, hero of *A Man Called Peter*, always was sensitive to his want of a complete college training, great pulpiteer though he was. Furthermore, it is impossible for a busy pastor to meet his students twice a week, as Vander Werp did, and do justice to the subjects taught. Rev. Vander Werp felt this keenly and more than once he asked to be relieved of his burden, but without avail. For lack of funds there was no possibility of organizing a seminary, and, since

no one could be found to take his place, he carried on as best he could. The Graafschap consistory, realizing his plight, was kind enough to relieve him of some of his pastoral duties. This was all the help he got. However, the Lord greatly blessed his labors. At least five men received their entire training for the sacred office from him. These were J. Stadt, W. Greve, L. Rietdijk, B. Mollema, and E. Vander Vries. John Schepers received only part of his education from Rev. Vander Werp. Five others began their studies with him. All wrought faithfully in the vineyard of the Lord; some served with distinction.

Acceptance of a call to Muskegon in 1872 transferred the seat of theological education from a rural community to a city. Whether this fact was advantageous may very well be doubted. Muskegon was a young lumber town with perhaps but slight cultural advantages to its credit. However this may be, here too Rev. Vander Werp labored heroically as preacher-professor until in 1875 he was incapacitated by the much-dreaded disease of cancer that attacked his throat. The students under his care were in the fall of this year transferred to Grand Rapids to be taught by the Reverend Geert Egbert Boer. Thus ended the school in the parsonage with the pastor of a busy congregation as professor and his study as the lecture room.

We have not yet come to the end of the list of Rev. Vander Werp's activities. Gradually our leaders became aware of the need of a paper to defend the church against the attacks of those who denied it the right of existence as a separate denomination and to provide the membership with edifying reading material. They proceeded cautiously, first ascertaining how large the subscription list would be, then in 1867 issuing a trial sheet with the title "Stem uit het Westen," *Voice from the West*. The response being meager, no second issue appeared. Persistence, however, won the day. February 14, 1868, *De Wachter* was launched and came from the press every two weeks thereafter. In the search for an editor the choice fell upon Rev. Vander Werp. Busy as he was, even to the point of being overburdened, he accepted; feeling keenly the need of a denominational paper to arouse in the membership an intelligent interest in the church, he could not re-

fuse. As could be expected, polemics were not wanting in this new publication, and contributions dealing with the Christian life as a personal experience as well as those having a doctrinal nature, together with a discussion of ecclesiastical problems of the day, filled its pages. There is no doubt that *De Wachter* did much in the way of molding the thought and policies of our churches. Meanwhile the load Rev. Vander Werp had to carry became a very heavy one.

THE sufferings of this servant of the Lord came to an end on April 1, where they await the sound of the trumpet and the glories of the resurrection. The large attendance at the funeral, in the procession of which rode no fewer than forty-two carriages, was a spontaneous tribute to the services so nobly rendered by this consecrated man. It is seventy-five years ago that he departed to be with Christ. Those who had their education with him are no longer living to keep alive the remembrance his devotion and toil deserve. Nevertheless the Vander Werp name is still fragrant among us through the ministry of one of his sons, the late Reverend William D. Vander Werp, and that of his grandson, the Reverend Marvin J. Vander Werp of Holland, Michigan. And we who are living and enjoying the blessings of a rich denominational heritage made possible very largely by his unstinted self-denying labors gladly do homage to his memory.

Rev. Vander Werp was a man of strong Reformed convictions. He was willing to suffer the reproaches of Christ. When the Secession broke out in 1834, he, though a young man of only twenty-three, openly joined the movement led by Rev. De Cock. At the suggestion of the latter he exposed in public print the Arminian and the Socinian sentiments found in a pamphlet written by a professor from Groningen. When the professor, who was also a commissioner of schools, if we may use a modern term, heard of the young teacher's attempt to make his Christian faith function in the school room, this official revengefully gave orders to the principal to dismiss the young enthusiast and saw to it that no other position was open to him. The loss of a good position was the price he paid for his loyalty to Christ. Again once he had cast in his lot with the de-

spised "Seceders" of America, he did not as did a few of his colleagues who had followed his example in accepting calls to America, lose faith in the movement of 1857, but remained loyal to it and toiled untiringly to promote its growth and wellbeing.

The strength of Vander Werp's convictions helps to explain the courage he displayed. Sentiment in the home church across the ocean was, by and large, rather unfavorable to the step taken by Rev. H. G. Klijn and Rev. K. Vanden Bosch and their followers. There was strong suspicion that those who asserted the right to withdraw from the Reformed Church of America in 1876, and his remains were laid at rest in the cemetery at Graafschap, and to return to a separate denominational existence on the basis of the terms expressed by Dr. Wijckoff in 1849 at the time of union did not have sufficient grounds for doing so. Nevertheless, when the call from Graafschap came, Rev. Vander Werp braved this adverse sentiment and accepted the call. Only one of his fellow divines, Rev. W. H. Van Leeuwen, had so far had the courage to espouse the cause of the "Seceders" so-called. After this several others followed the example of these

two during the pioneer period: W. H. Frieling, J. De Beer, R. Duiker, F. Hulst, K. Weiland, S. Baron, W. Coelingh, F. Rederus, and G. E. Boer.

IN explanation of the high esteem in which Rev. Vander Werp was held by his contemporaries we cannot help mentioning, in addition to his ability and willingness to shoulder heavy burdens, the piety of the man. He insisted not only on being sound in the faith and on experiencing the salient truths of salvation, but also on godly living. Though fervid, his piety was not of a sickly sentimental kind as a reading of his meditations in *De Wachter* reveals. His brief letter of farewell to his Muskegon charge which was read because he could no longer speak, though suffused with tenderness, nevertheless is marked by admirable restraint.

It was his sanity and honesty that kept his piety in balance. The "Churches under the Cross," a small group constituting a secession from the Secession, lacked ordained ministers. Having no one to administer the sacraments, they met one June Sunday of 1840 and arrogated to themselves the

prerogatives of ordination. Exhorter Vander Werp was one of those ordained, but he soon saw the folly of this irregular procedure, withdrew from the group, and continued to work at Uithuizen as an exhorter.

In his day Rev. Vander Werp was easily the most prominent and the most highly respected among the clergy of his group. The inference that he was the most competent and the most versatile seems abundantly warranted. No venture would succeed without his participation and guidance. No one was willing to shoulder as many heavy responsibilities as did he. He had the confidence of all. Without him the movement of 1857 might have ended in inglorious failure. The services he so self-sacrificingly rendered as minister of the gospel, as the trainer of men for the sacred office, as the editor of the denominational organ are deserving of admiration and of being gratefully remembered. Verily, to use the words of Paul with reference to himself, he "had labored more abundantly than they all."

"Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the Word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of your conversation."

The Principle of the Equal Ultimacy of Election and Reprobation

By JAMES DAANE

IN an article *Theology and Schism* (September issue), I asserted that there is a factor that has been operative in Reformed thinking that has adversely affected the history and spiritual outlook of the Reformed Churches. In the last sentence of that article, I designated this factor as the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. I added that although we reject this principle in theory, the character of our theological thinking and discussion indicates that we frequently accept it in practice.

Areas of Operation

IN what areas has the actual acceptance of this principle adversely affected Reformed thought? The covenant is one such area. The doctrine of the covenant has all too often been approached as though its meaning

could be uncovered equally well in terms of reprobation as election. When the key of reprobation was regarded as equally valid as the key of election for unlocking the truth of the covenant, the meaning and nature of the covenant became obscure. It then happened that large disagreement arose within the Reformed Churches concerning the meaning of the covenant. This disagreement became so large that there was no general agreement as to who is and who is not a member of the covenant. Even now there is no agreement whether all those born within the covenant are actually members of the covenant, or whether some (the non-elect) are only under the economy of the covenant. Nor is there agreement on the question whether everyone born within the covenant is the object of the covenant Promise. Thus, in the very churches which highly re-

garded the covenant, there was large disagreement over these very elemental considerations. The result of interpreting the covenant by equal reference to reprobation and election has been twofold. It has played a great part in breaking the unity of the Reformed Churches. It has also had the sad result of impoverishing the richness of the doctrine of the covenant.

It may also be added that this reduction of the meaning of the covenant by the employment of election and reprobation as equal keys of interpretation may indeed account for the fact that covenantal preaching is less prevalent than it once was. It is no secret that although none deny the covenant, many do not do much with it. The obscurity that has come to enshroud the doctrine of the covenant by this kind of double-reference interpretation quite likely has much to do with the fact that it has

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lost its former emphasis. What is not clear is hard to preach.

The influence of the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation can also be seen in the area of infant baptism. The meaning of infant baptism is greatly reduced and obscured when we seek to understand its meaning by an equal reference to election and reprobation. By the usage of this method some of us come to the position that infant baptism is only an *apparent or seeming baptism* for non-elect infants.

The same influence has been at work in our understanding of the gospel. Some have sought to make reprobation as valid a key as election for the understanding of the gospel. Where this has happened, the understanding of the gospel was distorted. One result of the application of the principle of equal ultimacy to the gospel has been the denial of a general offer of salvation.

Another area that has been injured by the application of the principle of equal ultimacy is that of Christian Ethics. When the facts of election and reprobation have been allowed to play an equal role in determining the Church's attitude toward the world, and the Christian's attitude toward his neighbor, Christian Ethics have suffered a set-back. When the distinction between elect and reprobate is allowed to play this equally determinative function in determining our attitude toward others, we have already begun to yield to that spiritual attitude concerning which Paul sharply warned the Church at Rome. Paul warned the Church at Rome that if they entertained a boastful and haughty attitude toward the Jews because the Jews were rejected so that they might be elected they themselves were in danger of being rejected by God.

Another area in which the principle of equal ultimacy has played a damaging role is in our definitions of the sovereignty of God. All too often we have thought that in order to maintain the sovereignty of God, we must think of the will of God as that which in the self-same manner wills sin and righteousness, reprobation and election, damnation and salvation. Too often we built on the erroneous presupposition that everything that happens is willed by God in the same sense as any thing else that happens. All too frequently the counsel of God as that which deter-

mines everything that comes to pass is used uncritically in theological argumentation. When the counsel of God is used as though it meant that God willed sin and goodness in the same sense, then the sovereignty of God may be presented as a great mystery that baffles the finite human mind. Such a mystery is a mystery indeed, but not a biblical one. When Reformed thinkers are in bondage to the unbiblical principle of equal ultimacy they make no distinctions between the facts of life. Created facts, sinful facts, and redemptive facts are all reduced to unqualified, brute facts. Facts are said to be simply facts. All are willed by God, and all are willed in the same fashion. After all the ethical qualities are abstracted, the remaining mass of brute facts are said to be willed and known by God, and such divine knowledge and divine sovereignty is presented as the divine mystery which touches human life at every point. What is rather a mystery is that such a conception of divine sovereignty, derived from the equal ultimacy of reprobation and election, should be accepted as a biblical definition of sovereignty rather than rejected for being nothing more than a philosophical determinism.

Equal Ultimacy as a Point of Theological Departure

FREQUENTLY the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation has been made the point of departure for the theological task of interpretation. Where this has happened there is sometimes an initial attempt to create a theology of balance in which election and reprobation are given an equal function in interpreting the biblical faith. Such a theological method, together with the theology of balance created by it, is both dangerous and futile. Dangerous, because it is at bottom nothing but a kind of theological dialecticism. Where this method is followed the preaching of the gospel is defined as both graciously well-meant and not graciously well-meant. Infant baptism is defined as both blessing and curse. God's common grace gifts of rain and sunshine become an expression both of divine blessing and wrath.

Such a theological method, and the theology created by it, are also futile. Futile, for the theological dialectical balance is never maintained for long —

if at all. A theology constructed by the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation always results in a reduction of the gospel and in a distortion of its meaning. These results stem from the fact that the principles of election and reprobation *cannot* be kept in balance. In such a theology the principle of reprobation always triumphs over the principle of election. The principle of reprobation by triumphing over the principle of election strips the gospel of its beauty, the covenant of its riches, and infant baptism of its significance. In ethics it results in the triumph of hate over love. Whenever reprobation is equated with election as definitive of the purposes of God, reprobation dominates the interpretation of the gospel and even the truth of election itself.

Moreover, it should not escape notice that a theology built on the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation frequently reveals a strange and terrible fascination for the abyss — for reprobation, wrath, judgment, hell. In its ethical expression it shows great concern for truth but little concern for love. It is more delighted with the antithesis than with the gospel of reconciliation. After the fashion of Jonah, it would rather be against the world than for it.

Why does a theology of the alleged equality of election and reprobation become a theology in which reprobation takes precedence over election, in which the worse triumphs over the better, sin over goodness, wrath over grace? The answer is simple. In the Bible, election takes precedence over reprobation. Moreover, *this* unbalance is *the nature of the gospel*. Consequently when this unbalance is disturbed by the equation of election and reprobation and the equation is used as a principle of gospel interpretation, the gospel is misinterpreted and its truth distorted. It is like jamming the wrong key into a lock — the lock itself is injured. The truth of the gospel simply cannot be poured into the equation of election and reprobation, for this equation does not correspond to the fabric of the gospel. Consequently, when the principle of reprobation is placed on a par with the principle of election and the equation is made a canon of interpretation, the truth of the gospel is seriously distorted, and the distortion always takes the shape of making the gospel less and less gospel. For election is far more indicative of the nature of the

gospel than is reprobation, just as love is more indicative of the nature of God than hatred, and goodness is more revelatory of the nature of God than curse.

Equal Ultimacy Rejected by Reformed Theology

WHAT I am saying in this writing is nothing new. It is only something that is sometimes forgotten. It is because Reformed theology has always recognized this priority of election over reprobation as a key to the understanding of the gospel and of the counsel of God, that Reformed theology has always rejected the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation.

Therefore our creeds speak a decidedly infra-lapsarian language. They speak a positive language in describing the divine act of election, and a more negative language in describing reprobation. We read, "some . . . are elected . . ." This is positive language describing a very positive divine action. But we read, "others are passed by in the eternal decree." This is negative language describing a negative divine act of reprobation. Similarly, in describing reprobation, God is said "to leave" the reprobate in his misery, and to "permit" them to follow their own ways.

This does not mean that reprobation is a sheer negation, as though there were nothing positive in it at all. But the recognition of this does not allow us to ignore the difference between the more positive act of election and the more negative act of reprobation. We must not be tempted to ignore this difference. Nor may we brush it aside because it is difficult to define with precision and difficult to maintain in the task of theological interpretation. To maintain it is difficult. To ignore it is easy, but the cost is high. The damage is greater when the Reformed theologian ignores the difference than when the Arminian ignores the truth of election and reprobation itself. And it should not be lost to our theological vision that it is only when this difference is ignored that it becomes possible to subscribe to the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation and to make them equally valid keys of biblical interpretation.

With what forthright and spirited language the Fathers of Dordt repudiated the principle of equal ultimacy!

In their conclusions to the Canons of Dordt they declare that, those have "violated all truth, equality, charity" who wish "to persuade the public . . . that in the same manner in which election is the fountain and the cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety . . . which the Reformed Churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul."

The repudiation of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation is then not something new or modern. On the contrary, it has been the traditional Reformed position. Many Reformed theologians could be cited to illustrate this traditional position. I shall mention but one. After stating that God cannot be said in the same sense to realize the reprobation of the reprobate as he does the election of the elect, Professor Berkhof declares, "He did not predestinate some unto sin, as He did others unto holiness" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 117). A statement such as this teaches us that the principles of election and reprobation may not be paired together and employed as equal principles of interpretation of the will and purposes of God.

The Bible and the Principle of Equal Ultimacy

THIS same unbalance characterizes biblical thought. There is a wealth of biblical evidence — which can here be but suggested — that the purposes of God in Christ are primarily election not reprobation, salvation not damnation, blessing not curse. The purposes of God in Christ are redemptive in a sense that they cannot be said to be damnatory. To meet the demands of the principle of equal ultimacy, the truth of John 3:16 may not be rewritten thus: God so hated the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever does not believe in him might be damned. And the truth of the following verse, that God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved, is a complete repudiation of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation.

Moreover, there is a gospel which is good news, but none which is bad news. The truth that God reconciled himself to the world through the Cross, therefore, may not be counter-balanced by an antithetical version of this truth. An erroneous fascination with the anti-

thesis may be offended at the biblical truth that God is for the world in Jesus Christ, but its attempt to annul this truth and avoid the offence by affirming that God is equally against the world in Jesus Christ, must be protested in the name of the gospel. The gospel is the gospel of the grace of God, not a gospel of the wrath of God.

There is indeed a judgment, wrath, curse against the world but this was laid upon him who died for the sin of the world. And because Christ died for the sin of the world and God through that death was reconciled unto the world not imputing unto them their trespasses, therefore, there is a word of grace for the world, a gracious offer of salvation which must be preached to every creature. Furthermore, the very proclamation that God is for the world in terms of the offer and demand of the Cross creates a moment of crisis which is full of wrath or blessing. This is a moment in which wrath or blessing breaks according to whether the hearer accepts or rejects Jesus Christ. It is this eschatological moment created by gospel proclamation for which the static, unhistorical versions of the antithesis have no eye. It is this version of the antithesis which bears no relationship to the Cross or to the proclamation of the gospel of the Cross which is offended by the declaration that God is for the world in the Cross, and that God is against the world only in the event that the world is against God's being for the world in Jesus Christ. Such a conception of the antithesis is rooted in the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. Because the latter is grounded in an unbiblical conception of time and eternity, the former has no room for the biblical eschatology.

The unbalance between reprobation and election, wrath and grace, is reflected in the whole biblical presentation of the biblical message. There is a covenant of grace, not a covenant of wrath. The covenant with Old Testament Israel must be defined primarily in reference to the election of Israel not primarily or equally in reference to the rejection of the Gentiles. Even the election of Israel is for the later election of the Gentiles. Through Israel's election the Gentiles are to receive the blessing of election.

Consequently, there is a gospel which must be designated as the gospel of reconciliation, not as a gospel of the antithesis. The gospel is a gospel of salvation, not a gospel of damnation.

Equal Ultimacy — Continued

Jesus is the light of the world: He is not the world's darkness. He is the Prince of Peace, not the Prince of War. God made him to be our peace, not our strife. In him God made peace and slew the enmity—not the reverse. This is not at all to deny that Christ is the judgment of this world, that he sends the sword, that he divides between father and son. But it is to insist that Christ is all of these things only as a consequence of the world's being against God's being for the world in Jesus Christ. All of these elements must be kept within the primary affirmation that Christ came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. But it is precisely this pattern of biblical thought that the principle of equal ultimacy cannot retain.

God's Word to man in the Bible is always defined in reference to his goodness and grace. The person who is lost because he has despised the goodness of God, and the lost hearer of the gospel is lost because he has insisted on retaining the antithesis rather than accept the reconciliation.

If then we are to understand the true nature of the biblical message we shall have to do it by means of a primary reference to election not reprobation, to grace not wrath, to salvation not damnation.

But this is the very thing that Reformed theological discussion has so frequently failed to do when it debated such doctrines as the covenant, infant baptism, the offer of the gospel, the antithesis, and the matter of the Christian's ethical attitude toward the world. All too often these and other doctrines have been defined with a primary reference to reprobation. The method of interpretation frequently employed has been: In view of the fact that reprobate infants are baptized, what can baptism mean? What does gospel proclamation actually declare, since what it declares must be something that fits the reprobate hearer? When the meaning of biblical doctrines has been sought by a method that defines them primarily in terms of the reprobate rather than in terms of the elect, the meaning of these doctrines has been seriously restricted, and these restricted doctrinal versions have frequently played a large part in the breaking of the unity of the Reformed Churches.

The principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation as definitive of God's purposes in Christ is to be regarded therefore as a non-biblical and non-Reformed principle. Yet this unbalance has been frequently ignored. In later articles I hope to present one or two concrete examples to show that in actual theological thinking Reformed thought actually accepts what in theory it rejects.

Why do Reformed theological thinkers sometimes fall into the acceptance of the principle of equal ultimacy? I suppose it is because this principle is so much easier to handle than the biblical one. The latter is not easily formulated. Nor is it easily presented in a nice systematic pattern. The biblical principle of unbalance calls for a serious recognition of biblical eschatology — a field in which Reformed theology has never been strong. Yet I believe there is nothing that would be more wholesome for our conception of gospel proclamation, the general offer, the antithesis, Christian Ethics, than for these conceptions to be brought under the impact of biblical eschatology.

In contrast to the biblical principle of unbalance, the principle of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation is easily formulated in a systematic manner because *it operates with a timeless logic*. But the history of our Reformed Churches should teach us that the principle of equal ultimacy which makes possible an easy and vigorous application of a timeless logic is the very thing which has brought a shadow of obscurity over these very doctrines we hold precious, and has played a real role in breaking the unity of the Reformed churches. It may also be that right at this point we have the reason for the fact that many of the truths that are most precious in our tradition receive so light a touch in the pulpits of our day.

LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

Concerning Common Grace

DEAR EDITOR:

BECAUSE of the prominence which the issue of Common Grace is receiving in your magazine in the articles from the hand of the Rev. Daane, and because of his recurring reference to the Protestant Reformed Churches and their position on this issue, may I be permitted to submit for your columns the following reflections.

Anyone who reads a few of the religious magazines of the day is aware that the issue of common grace is again coming to the foreground. We may be thankful about this because it is evident that the church in the world cannot continue a healthful existence very long without confronting the ques-

tions, theological and ethical, that are implied in the issue that has now more or less received that name. When we hear the name we may be inclined to think, "O, yes that issue of 1924;" but that would be a serious error, of course. The complex of problems is much bigger than something that can be conceived of as arising in 1924 and as flashing over the horizon for a few moments of ecclesiastical time. It is a question that is an integral part of the whole Biblical, Reformed structure of theology and ethics and culture. And the value of the discussion will not be the passing satisfaction of "justifying 1924" in either direction. Rather, it is an issue that concerns the church of Jesus Christ unto the end of her existence here and of her worship of God in the heav-

enly consummation, where redemption's song will be the theme of the eternal ages . . .

The purpose of my present article is to sound a warning. I say this advisedly because experience teaches that a wrong approach is almost sure to end in hopeless misunderstanding and estrangement.

I may note here at the outset that the Rev. Daane has in the past made comment on the issues of the covenant being discussed also in the Protestant Reformed Churches. In that connection the Rev. De Boer in *Concordia*, and the Rev. Hoeksema in *The Standard Bearer* conclusively showed that his documentation and analysis were defective and faulty, and that his conclusions were unwarranted.

In the *Reformed Journal* of July and of September he touches on the issue of Common Grace.

I think we may welcome the contributions that the Rev. Daane may make in this discussion on the issue of Common Grace. But then we will also have to remind here that the issue and analysis will have to be set forth carefully and correctly.

As an instance I shall note a statement in the issue of July, which involves the point and yet leaves the issue very confused. We read there, "... the Gospel which must be generally offered to all is also related to the antithesis, for the gospel is the gospel of *reconciliation*. It proclaims that God is reconciled to the world in the Cross, and that the world is invited and obliged to be reconciled to God through the same Cross . . . The antithetical attitude is in the first instance God's attitude. God is the one who posited the enmity (Gen. 3:15). And God is the one who has slain the enmity through the Cross (Eph. 2:16). Therefore, God's antithetical attitude is redemptive and is characterized by redemptive love."

Now certainly this presentation does not do justice to God's antithetical attitude toward the world.

In the first place, it is not correct to say that "God is reconciled to the world in the cross." In the Bible the relation is exactly the opposite, namely, that the world is reconciled, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their sins unto them (Rom. 5:8-11! II Cor. 5:18-20). In the light of John 3:16 this means that God Himself was eternally reconciled to the world, for He loved it. And then He sent His Son to correct the relation and the attitude of these inimical ones toward Himself. Hence, this is in principle fully accomplished in the cross of His Son, and it is surely and effectively wrought by His Spirit in their hearts and lives in due time.

Therefore it is also very unclear when the Rev. Daane implies that this reconciliation is of such a nature that it slays the enmity of Gen. 3:15. The enmity that is slain is that of the woman's seed toward God its Creator and Lord. This enmity is removed and corrected, by the paying of their sins and by meriting the Spirit of sonship and sending Him into their hearts. But this does not slay the enmity of the other contestants of Gen. 3:15, namely, the enmity of God and the Holy Seed toward the Serpent and its seed, or *vice versa*, of the serpent and its countless seed toward God and His.

God is not reconciled to them, He is not conciliatory to them, He has not

fundamentally altered His relation to them through the Cross, and the Gospel does not proclaim that He stands as such, neither in eternity, nor in time.

It may be valuable to discuss the nature of the confrontation of men with the Cross and its message, but our fathers in the Confessions have spoken such clear words about the deep Divine attitude and efficacy that we must not introduce confusion at that point.

Coming to the issue of September, we must realize that Rev. Daane's comment there is of a rather introductory nature. And yet it has its importance. And therefore I will also place a few question-marks there to keep our attention at a critical tone. The Rev. Daane says, "It would seem that this event (in the Protestant Reformed Churches) is a historical justification for the Three Points of 1924 . . ." The word "seem" is pivotal. A thing can be only "seemingly" so. The idiom can also mean, "on the basis of all the evidence we must conclude . . ." We cannot say what the words of the Rev. Daane imply. We do not know whether it is based on stringent evidence.

Again he states, "Although they do not admit it, those of the Prot. Ref. Churches who now disagree with the Rev. H. Hoeksema have taken at least one theological step back toward the Christian Reformed churches." They have "theologically conceded that grace can after all be offered . . ."

Here the key word is "offer." But here we shall have to be very careful to determine and to state what we mean by "offer."

In the mouth of the Arminian it means that (1) the grace has been merited by Christ for all to whom it is "offered," (2) that whether it shall become theirs is "open" in God's counsel of Predestination, (3) that man has the innate spiritual power to accept this offer, (4) that God earnestly desires that this offer shall be accepted, but He will not and cannot irresistibly deliver it to man, and (5) that the acceptance of this offer must be constantly reaffirmed to remain valid.

That is one meaning of the word. And so taken we may confidently say that the Rev. Daane does not believe in an offer of grace. We would expect he agrees with us in rejecting the idea of "offer"?

However, he says he does not. So he must mean something else.

What does he mean?

Let us begin at the other end.

He says he believes in the "offer." But neither have the Protestant Reformed denied the idea of an "offer."

It is true that when we speak of the grace of God as being offered the usage may be rather loose. But the Protestant Reformed do not deny that our Confessions speak of Christ being offered in the Gospel (Canons III and IV:9) nor that the fathers rather freely used the term.

To begin with, we have certainly never denied that we can speak of offer in an older use of the word as *present*, *introduce*, *being before*. That is evident from many statements in the past.

In the second place, we surely do not deny that Christ and His salvation and peace and victory are offered in the sense that God herein declares to man what he must have to be restored to God, also offered in the sense that man evaluates and rejects that which is presented, after having even approved it by rejoicing for a time in its light and experience (John 5:35, 38; Heb. 6:4), and in the sense that he shall be held accountable for having rejected it.

That narrows the area of disagreement considerably.

So now where is the disagreement within this limited area?

We seem limited to the attitude of God in the "offer" and perhaps to the question as to what determines the outcome of this offer.

I believe that the Rev. Daane should observe these limits of the question if we are to learn from the discussion.

And I think that if we consult the discussion and the documents of "1924" we will find that the question was within this limit. And then it can still be limited. He will find that the word "*welmeenend*" or "*welgemeend*" was really a key word.

But that did not give full expression. The word, well-meant, well-meaning, earnestly, seriously, must still be controlled. For it was not the question, whether God means what He says, and asseverates.

Rather the question was whether God in confronting man, with this offer does so in saving love to all who hear, does so with the desire to save them all, also with love to those who are not actually saved, and thus in this offer expresses a desire and a yearning that they shall accept it.

For this raised the serious question how this was to be reconciled with the evident teaching of Scripture as our

Letters to the Journal — Continued

Fathers were led to formulate and confess it at Dordrecht, namely, that God's determination is not to save them, He has excluded them from the provision made for the others in the atonement, He withholds from them the efficacious operation which He freely and efficaciously applies to the others.

The Rev. Daane will have to keep this in mind if he would discuss fruitfully on 1924 and the offer of grace.

My space is used. In a closing word I shall like to anticipate the possible discussion which could arise from the last sentence of his article (Sept. 1953, p. 5). There he asks the question whether the tendency to move toward denial of common grace in Reformed thought is caused by the rejection in theory but acceptance in actual thinking of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation.

The word ultimacy is a very weighty word here. Are election and reprobation both ultimate? In what sense ultimate? Does the Rev. Daane object to the ultimacy? Or does he object to the equality of the ultimacy? Just what is the difference between "theory" and "actual thinking"? Does he mean that sound theology rejects it, but that practical attitudes in living assume or accept this equality of the ultimacy?

These are important considerations when such a weighty assertion operates with the terms.

Rev. A. Petter
51 Fuller Ave., N. E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dr. Daane's Reply

SINCE I intend to treat the three main points of Rev. A. Petter's letter more fully in later articles, my reply here may be brief.

1. Regarding the offer of salvation, the Rev. Petter sees but two alternatives: (a) an Arminian conception of the offer in which man's response of faith is defined as a contribution to his salvation. As he suggests, I do not hold to this view, for faith is a response to *grace*, and grace means — and faith is the recognition of this meaning — that salvation is wrought by God alone; (b) the Protestant Reformed conception of the offer in which the offer is defined as a mere *showing*, or *exhibition*, of the gospel. My ob-

jection to this view is that a mere showing of the gospel does not thrust the hearer into a situation of personal crisis, into an eschatological moment which the New Testament calls "now" (Acts 17:30), into a moment in which life or death is the issue. However much difficulty we may have in further defining such a moment of the gospel offer, in my judgment the New Testament clearly teaches such a moment of personal crisis. But no moment of crisis is achieved, if the gospel is merely *exhibited*. If the proclamation of the gospel is nothing more than an exhibition of the Promise, then the only demand made upon the hearer is that he become a spectator. But gospel proclamation is more than an exhibition, just as faith is more than a mere spectator-kind of contemplation. My difficulty with the Protestant Reformed denial that the gospel is an offer is: How can the gospel be rejected, if it is not offered? And how can there be room for that wrath of God that follows the rejection of the gospel in a theology that denies that there is an offer to be rejected?

2. Rev. Petter denies that God *himself* is reconciled to the world, and claims to find support in II Cor. 5 which states that "God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ," and "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself . . ." (vs. 18, 19). But do not these verses teach precisely that God *himself* needed to be, and was reconciled to the world through Christ? Does not Paul teach that just because God is reconciled through the Cross "we are ambassadors *therefore* on behalf of Christ . . . be ye reconciled to God" (vs. 20)? Must not God himself be reconciled to the world? Must not his wrath against sin be removed through the satisfaction of his justice? Paul's argument moves from the truth that God is reconciled to the world to the truth that the world must now be reconciled to God.

Rev. Petter asserts that only man, not God, needs to be reconciled to the world. His reason is that God is *eternally* reconciled to the world. He claims that this is apparent in the light of John 3:16. But does not this verse teach precisely the opposite? Does it not teach that God had to be reconciled to the world in time through the historical Cross? Thus at this point it again becomes apparent that there is no room

in Rev. Petter's theology for the wrath of God, for the truth that even the elect are by nature children of wrath even as the rest.

It seems quite plain that it is the question of eternity and time that accounts for the differences between Rev. Petter and myself. He subscribes to an *eternal reconciliation*. He regards this eternal reconciliation as the reason for the Cross, rather than the result of the Cross. But thus regarded, eternal reconciliation is a contradiction in terms. There is no reconciliation — no reconciling *again* — if reconciliation is *eternal*. What is eternal does not and cannot *happen*; much less can it happen *again*. To be reconciled again implies a time of non-reconciliation, a time of wrath; it also implies still another time in which the attitude of wrath is reconciled. An eternal reconciliation has nothing to do with time; nor has it anything to do with the Cross. It is because of this that Rev. Petter regards the Cross not as the effectuation of the reconciliation, but as a mere exhibition of it. At this point his conception of reconciliation and his conception of the gospel offer meet: both are merely *exhibitions*. But neither the Cross nor the gospel of reconciliation may be reduced to mere temporal exhibitions of eternal realities.

Rev. Petter refers to my earlier discussion with Rev. Hoeksema. I wish only to mention that it was Hoeksema's conception of the covenant as *eternal* to which I objected — the same conception that accounts for the differences now between Rev. Petter and myself. In view of the fact that when Rev. Hoeksema presented a definition of the covenant, and challenged me to show that I was un-Reformed, he dropped from his definition both the word and the idea of "*eternal*," it is doubtful whether his "*conclusively*" showed that my criticisms were faulty. And the fact that the request I then made to deal with this matter in *The Standard Bearer* went unanswered indicates that the discussion was neither conclusive nor concluded.

3. As to the question of what I mean by denying the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation, I refer you to my article on the subject in this issue of the *Journal*, and especially to the quotation from the Canons of Dordt.

In closing may I express myself happy for this bit of exchange with Rev. Petter, for it touches on the heart of the matter that keeps my church and

is apart. More such good spirited discussions may under God bring us closer together.

James Daane

"Theology and Schism"

DEAR EDITOR:

It was with interest that I read the article of Dr. Jaames Daane on "Theology and Schism" in the September issue of the *Reformed Journal*. It is encouraging to note that the theological issue of 1924 is again being discussed, and that Dr. Daane is of the conviction that it is 'of sufficient significance to warrant a continuation of the theological conversation in the hope of healing the breach.' If this theological conversation is to bear fruit, however, it must be remembered that the matter of 'Common Grace' is not a matter of emphasis, but a matter of truth concerning God's attitude over against the reprobate ungodly. We appreciate it that also Dr. Daane has pointed this out in his article.

At this time I would like to call attention to the following statement of Dr. Daane, which I fear might lead the discussion in the wrong direction. "Although they do not admit it, those of the Protestant Reformed Churches who now disagree with the Rev. H. Hoeksema (in *re* the matter of conditions.—B.K.) have taken at least one theological step back toward the Christian Reformed Church." This statement seems to imply that those who now disagree with the Rev. H. Hoeksema on this score have changed their doctrinal position as concerning the question of 'Common Grace' as expressed in the 'Three Points' of 1924. This, however, as I see it, is not true. It is still certain amongst us that on the basis of Scripture and Confessions it is impossible to speak of a gracious attitude of God over against the reprobate ungodly.

Not those who now disagree with the Rev. H. Hoeksema have changed their doctrinal position, but in denying all use of the term 'condition' in the matter of salvation, the Rev. H. Hoeksema has recently changed his doctrinal position, and has thereby not only taken a theological step further away from the Christian Reformed Churches, but has taken a theological step away from the historical Reformed position, and has caused a shameful breach in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The writings of the Rev. H. Hoeksema since 1924 abundantly prove that was always his theological position

that the grace of God is particular, just because it is conditional, or more correctly it is conditional because it is particular. God is merciful only unto such as love Him, and keep His commandments. He saves only those that fly to Him for pity and redemption, that come to Him, that forsake their wicked ways, repent and believe. Needless to say that this 'condition' no man can fulfill of himself, for without the operation of the Holy Spirit man cannot fulfill any conditions whatsoever. Faith and repentance are the gifts of God, and these gifts He bestows upon whosoever He wills.

Hence, the theological issue in 1924 was not that of 'conditions,' and in the strictest sense not even that of an 'offer,' but that of 'Common Grace.' The oft repeated question which was then at stake, and still is, is the question, "What grace is there in the preaching of the Gospel unto the reprobates?" or "Is the preaching of the Gospel grace to all who hear"? Is not the preaching of the Gospel, according to the very intent of God, either a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death?

Therefore we cannot agree with Dr. Daane when he contends "that those who differ from Hoeksema and affirm the rightful place of 'conditions' within Reformed theology have thereby theologially conceded that grace can after all be offered inasmuch as a condition is in its very nature of the essence of an offer." We who now differ from the Rev. H. Hoeksema do not have to concede this for the simple reason that we have always maintained this as Protestant Reformed Churches. This can be abundantly proved from the writings in the *Standard Bearer*, as

also from the following quotation taken from Rev. H. Hoeksema's brochure *Calvin, Berkhof and Kuiper*, p. 32: "He (Calvin) affirms here, what we have always taught, as we have written often in the past, that, in as far as the message is general and comes to all, it is *conditional*."

"The offer is eternal life.

"The condition limiting this offer is: turn from your wicked ways.

"This condition makes the contents of the general message particular."

But this is something entirely different from the first point of 1924 which teaches that God is gracious to all who hear the Gospel. The very fact that the offer is conditional emphasizes that it is particular. It only promises grace and salvation to those that turn from their wicked ways, and this 'condition' no man is able to fulfill except through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

In denying the *conditio sine qua non* in the matter of salvation the Rev. H. Hoeksema is attempting the impossible, namely of dispensing with that which is indispensable, and in this we disagree with him. But in my opinion Dr. Daane is confusing the issue when he affirms that we have taken a theological step back to the Christian Reformed Churches when we seek to affirm the rightful place of 'conditions' within Reformed theology. We would joyfully welcome the day, however, when our Christian Reformed brethren would heal the breach which now so painfully separates us, by confessing with us that the grace of God is never Common, but always Particular.

Rev. Bernard Kok,
Pastor of the First
Protestant Reformed
Church, Holland, Michigan

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